

## SEMIOTIC DIMENSIONS AND FILMIC PROJECTIONS OF AFRICAN SOCIO-CULTURAL REALITIES IN SELECTED MOUNT ZION FILMS

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**Abstract:** *This paper discusses audience perceptions of how two Mount Zion films (The Gods Are Dead, and Land of Fury) project African culture. Also, it probes into the implications of the attitude of Evangelical films to African cultural practices. The study is a case-oriented qualitative comparative analysis; it adopts an ethnographic method to elicit data using a structured questionnaire, in-depth interviews with Key Informants (KII), and Focused Group Discussions (FGD) methods. Between October 2021 and March 2022, the researcher screened the two videos to purposively selected audiences in the cities of Lagos, Enugu and Abuja. Findings reveal convergences and areas of divergences between African and Biblical worldviews, distortions and a negative portrayal of African realities. The study recommends an emphatic appreciation of African culture and further analytical studies towards identifying the trends and twists in producing evangelical videos.*

**Key Words:** African Social-Cultural Realities, Mount Zion Faith Ministry, Evangelisation

### **Introduction**

The incursion of the evangelical genre into the booming Nollywood film industry in Nigeria is a recent development. However, Religion has immensely impacted Films from the inception of Christianity in the 1840s. The missionaries employed entertainment among other methods in the process of evangelisation.<sup>1</sup> They utilised the Africans' theatrics passion, set up guilds and performed plays.<sup>2</sup> Works on Christianity in Nigeria in general, and film studies in particular, underline the role of the missionaries, their initial attitude to African culture, the

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<sup>1</sup> Victoria Adeniyi, "Beyond Entertainment: Christian Video films and Evangelism in Nigeria," in *Africa through the Eye of the Video Camera*, ed. Foluke Ogunleye (Matsapha, Swaziland: Academic Publishers, 2008), 238-248.

<sup>2</sup> Foluke Ogunleye, "Evolutionary Trends in Nigerian Christian Drama," in *Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity*, ed. David O. Ogungbile and Akintunde E. Akinade (Lagos: Malthouse, 2010), 249-268.

growth of independent artists, and the birth of Nollywood. While Omole<sup>3</sup> appraises the rise, activities and classification of Christian artists, Ogunleye<sup>4</sup> evaluates the initial attitude of the mission churches to drama stressing that the missionaries denounced African elements like dress, drums, language, and dancing as inconsistent with Christian ideals despite the era's cultural nationalism. Perhaps, the most relevant to this survey is the work of Obododimma Oha<sup>5</sup> which analyses *The Great Mistake*, a three-part Mount Zion Faith Ministry (MZFM) video by Mike Bamiloye in 1995. Oha brings to the fore the African thought of the visible world as a battleground between the dual forces of Satan and God. The spiritual warfare dominates the film in which evil and evil spirits are symbolised differently.<sup>6</sup> For example, the tree symbol “demonstrates a ‘multivoicedness’ or rather a dialectical relationship between the Christian and indigenous African religious voices.”<sup>7</sup> Oha notes that the film portrays water spirits “as being completely malevolent and mischievous.”<sup>8</sup> This projection is contrary to the Yoruba /African beliefs in river divinities like *Olokun*, *Yemoja* and *Osun*. Since many issues surround the role of religion and culture in film studies, this study focuses on the following questions. What are the audiences' perceptions of the African cultural realities in the two MZFM films? To what extent are the selected films reflective of African spirituality? Finally, what are the implications of the attitude of Evangelical films to African cultural practices?

This study is a case-oriented qualitative comparative analysis which adopts an ethnographic method to elicit data through a structured questionnaire corroborated with in-depth interviews with Key Informants (KII) and Focused Group Discussions (FGD) methods using a tape recorder. The approach and methodology are justified by grounded theory, exploring new methods for gathering data and analysis. The study retrieves primary data from participants (intellectuals,

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<sup>3</sup> Timothy Opeyemi Omole, “Christian Drama/Theatre: It’s Development with References to Nigerian Churches,” *Afro-Asian Journal of Social Sciences* X, no. 11 (2019): 5-11; <http://onlinejournalresearch.com/aaajoss/art/319.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Ogunleye Omole, “Evolutionary Trends.”

<sup>5</sup> Obododimma Oha, “The Rhetoric of Nigerian Christian Videos: The War Paradigm of The Great Mistake,” in *Nigerian Video Films*, ed. Jonathan Haynes (Athens: Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 2000), 192-199.

<sup>6</sup> Oha, “The Rhetoric,” 197.

<sup>7</sup> Oha, “The Rhetoric,” 199.

<sup>8</sup> Oha, “The Rhetoric,” 198.

producers, and the public) selected through the purposive sampling method. The survey straddles the Northern, Eastern, and Southwestern parts of Nigeria where the two films - *The Gods Are Dead* and *The Land of Fury* were screened to purposively selected audiences in the cities of Lagos, Enugu, and Abuja between October 2021 and March 2022. Two trained research assistants helped in data collection and transcription. All the participants were duly informed of the purpose of the research, and they granted their consent. The researcher ensured confidentiality, anonymity, justice, privacy, and respect for persons during the research and beyond. Except for the Bamiloyes, the identities of other participants are treated with anonymity as 'pseudo names' are used.

### **Brief Analysis of Selected MZFM Films**

*The Gods are Dead* is a 1995 movie starring Mike Bamiloye (*Oba Alajuwon* of Bode-Ajuwon), Jide Ilugbo (Rev'd James, the Stranger-Evangelist), Israel Ore-Adewole (Wingoroye, the Chief Priest), Dele Tomori (*Ifa* Priest), and Elvon Jarret (Old Man) among others. The film, set in a rusty village, depicts the ancient: houses of mud, palm oil lanterns and torches, mats, and plaited hairs. Throughout the play, only the Stranger-Evangelist displayed some elements of modernity: T-shirts, trousers, plastic bottles, shoes, and a suit.

The film opens and closes with the celebrations of two contrasting festivals to two different Gods: The annual sacrifice of a virgin to the dreaded *Orisa Agbogbon*, the principal deity of Bode-Ajuwon, and the Festival of Liberty, to Jesus Christ. Between the two carnivals, the town had mass transitioned from the traditional religion to Christianity. Rev'd James' arrival coincides with the first celebrations, *Alajuwon* and his chiefs were, therefore, lenient to the intruder-stranger cum evangelist. The appeasement to the gods fails to revive the ailing *Areemo* Obawunmi (the Crown Prince) whom the Evangelist later resuscitated. This singular miracle led to the conversion of the *Alajuwon* and his entire household: the three *Oloris* (Queens), all dependents, and palace guards. The subsequent face-off between Wingoroye (the Chief Priest) and other Chiefs, on one hand, and the Evangelist and the King on the other led to a battle for supremacy that witnessed altercations, threats, invocations, and vigils. The mysterious death of the Chief Priest and his allies signals the failure of all the gods of

Bode-Ajuwon. In a message at the scene of the incident, *Oba* Alajuwon declares the Festival of Liberty in commemoration.

In 2018, Mike Bamiloye's first son, Damilola, wrote and directed the second movie, *Land of Fury* produced by the Mount Zion Film Productions (MZFP) in collaboration with the Nigerian Corpers' Christian Fellowship (NCCF), Kebbi State. The movie mirrors the insecurity in Nigeria showcasing a typical case of mass kidnapping which has become a recurrent factor in the nation's chequered history since 2014.<sup>9</sup> The bandits, led by a self-styled *General* (Joseph Opadele), intercepted a school bus out on an excursion in the Northern Christian community of Karaka and abducted twenty girls and David, their teacher.<sup>10</sup> Two women had the premonitions of the incident and were uneasy about the excursion. While David's mother was reluctant, Princess's mother (Elthosin Emmanuel) rightly objected but for her husband.

David and Princess eventually became prominent in the movie. At the criminal's camp in the forest, the bandits kept David away from the girls and attempted to use him as the scapegoat for the Fifty Million Naira (N50M) ransom demanded via a video. On-demand, Mario picked Princess to satisfy the *hunger* (sex) of the *General*. Miraculously, the bandits spared David as they misunderstood his bible quotations and thought he was a Prince (*Dan Saki*). Therefore, they nicknamed him *Treasure Boy* because they assumed that he would fetch them more treasures (ransom). To Mario's surprise, *General* strangely requested Princess to read from the bible they had seized from David. Mario and *General* had private encounters with David and Princess respectively which led to their miraculous healings from the spiritual entanglements encountered in their desperate search for power. Expectedly, the incident threw the whole state into turmoil as parents, teachers, and the Governor prayed desperately. The Police busted the hideout of the gangs and freed those kidnapped. Mario and *General* died in the ensuing exchange of firearms while the Police arrested

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<sup>9</sup> Since 2014, mass kidnapping has become an endemic security challenge in Nigeria. See, Oberiri Destiny Apuke, "The Evolution of Boko Haram, Its Attack on Chibok Girls and the American Amnesty Intervention: A Contextual Analysis," *National Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development* 1, no. 3 (2016): 14-17; [www.nationaljournals.com](http://www.nationaljournals.com) (Assessed: April 26, 2024).

<sup>10</sup> The bandits killed the driver at the point of the abduction.

other members of the notorious gang. The arrival of the abductees turned Kakara into moments of jubilation and thanksgiving.

## Discussion of Findings

The study addresses how the selected films reflect African socio-cultural realities. In an interview, Mike Bamiloye acknowledges the convergence of African cultural practices like respect, orderliness, and hard work with biblical worldview in the film, *The Gods Are Dead*. However, he notes that the film particularly emphasises the opposite sides especially human sacrifice, saying that,

Africans have a very good culture but the reality I responded to is the bad side of African culture which is the human sacrifice. Thus, in *The Gods Are Dead*, I responded to the evil side of the culture, the human sacrifice. Instead, I showed the strength and the power of our Lord Jesus Christ that I believe in and what God could do. Christ raised up the Prince the way he raised Lazarus. All the gods mentioned in the movie have one negative impact on the village.<sup>11</sup>

On the significance of the overall setting of the film, Mike Bamiloye agrees that everything is unambiguously symbolic; he *created* the town and all in it: the seven divinities, their *orikis* (panegyrics), and totems. He intentionally wanted the set to be very traditional to prove that the story is traditional, and it is in a remote village for about 50 – 60 years. We didn't want to portray anything modern except the water bottle that the evangelist used.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the issue of traditional versus modern runs throughout the film; the village and the entire practices stand for the traditional while the Evangelist represents the modern. Accordingly, Bamiloye intentionally underscores two facts: the superiority of the power of God in Christ and the authenticity of modern medicine. Furthermore, he wants Africans to leverage the power of Christ and modern scientific breakthroughs answerable to many problems and diseases instead of *servng* idols. He notes further that,

All the gods mentioned in that film were not adding value to the village. For example, what value is in killing virgins or afflicting

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<sup>11</sup> Mike Bamiloye, interview granted the researcher on November 2, 2021 in Lagos.

<sup>12</sup> Mike Bamiloye, interview granted the researcher on November 2, 2021 in Lagos.

with smallpox? We believe that these are the bondage that has kept so many African villages and towns in the past... So we cannot be lifting Jesus and at the same time lifting idols. The preacher visited the village to preach and the power behind the preacher appeared to him in a dream and told him the secret of the power of that village. The Evangelist successfully displayed the knowledge before the King.<sup>13</sup>

On his part, Damilola Mike-Bamiloye responds,

The best way to promote African ideologies and African principles is by showing them in a better light... for me... as beautiful as African culture is if the light of Christ is missing, if the God-factor is missing, if Jesus Christ is missing then it becomes a work in darkness.... I believe in showing African culture from God's perspective.<sup>14</sup>

Damilola acknowledges the good sides of African socio-cultural realities but chooses, like his father does, to portray the bad aspects such as demonology, kidnapping, juju, ritual killing, and insecurity. Similarly, the issue of intentionality is reflected in this case as Damilola confirms that he specifically chose the settings saying, "The environment influences our stories and how we pass them across to the audience."<sup>15</sup> When asked about his views on African divinities, Damilola refers to them as 'powers and principalities,' a standard description among Nigerian Evangelicals. On why he refers to the African divinities as 'powers and principalities,' Damilola states unapologetically that "Jesus is the only name we exalt in our films." He buttresses his stand with Phil. 2:10 that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.<sup>16</sup>

On the making of bandits, a participant opines that the bandits "have lost touch with the society due to misgovernance, poor economy, unemployment, and spiritual deceptions."<sup>17</sup> He concludes that the

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<sup>13</sup> Mike Bamiloye, interview granted the researcher on November 2, 2021 in Lagos.

<sup>14</sup> Damilola Mike-Bamiloye, interview granted the researcher on October 2, 2021 in Lagos.

<sup>15</sup> Damilola Mike-Bamiloye, interview granted the researcher on October 2, 2021 in Lagos.

<sup>16</sup> Damilola Mike-Bamiloye, interview granted the researcher on October 2, 2021 in Lagos. This attitude is called particularism in the study of Religions. However, too much particularism could breed conflicts and disharmony.

<sup>17</sup> Moses Ogu, interview granted the researcher on February 14, 2022 at Enugu.

society *created* the bandits and buttresses his assertion with some lines of Burna Boy's *The Monster You Made*:

The oppressed generate  
 When they've been working like slaves  
 To get some minimum wage  
 You turn around and you blame  
 Them for their anger and rage  
 Put them in shackles and chains  
 Because of what they became  
 We are the monsters you made.<sup>18</sup>

The attitude and confessions of the bandits confirm that many are dissatisfied with the management of the nation. Some youths take to banditry and other anti-social activities as revenge for a society that has disappointed them.

Africans, like the Judeo-Christians, believe in the existence of spirits with the exception that not all spirits are demonic and malignant. So, the Yorubas believe in the existence of both benevolent and malevolent spirits. For example, witches can be good (*aje funfun*, white witches) or wicked (*aje dudu*, black witches) depending on their activities. Unlike Christianity, the African belief system contains portions of animatism and, or animism. Animatism, to Idowu,<sup>19</sup> is thinking that inanimate objects possess active attributes of life. On his part, Akin-Otiko<sup>20</sup> views animism as ascribing a living soul to inanimate objects and natural phenomena. Africans believe that spirits could transform mundane objects like trees, rivers, mountains, and animals into sacred entities by *associating* with them. Hence, the African theology of creation in particular and worldview in general is holistic, integral, and predominantly symbolic.

The *Gods Are Dead* portrays belief in spirits and animism as each of the seven *Orisas* (Deities) makes yearly demands (sacrifices), has a portfolio (functions), sacred spot (sanctuary), rituals, and a set of *do's* and *don'ts* (taboos). Also, the Yoruba can identify an object by the

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<sup>18</sup> Damini Egunoluwa Ogulu (AKA Burna Boy), "Monsters You Made," 2020, Lagos, Universal Music Publishing Group.

<sup>19</sup> E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM, 1973), 133.

<sup>20</sup> Paul A. Akin-Otiko, *Adimula Religion in Yoruba Land: A New Perspective* (Lagos: Gold Press, 2015), 25.

spirit that is associated with it. For instance, *Orisa Ogbaagun* abides in the *Ogbaagun* tree by the main entrance from where it *polices* the town, being the *spiritual gatekeeper*. Another deity, *Mujemuje*, occupies River *Mujemuje*, while *Alajogun* resides in *Alajogun* Forest. The town's principal deity, *Orisa Agbongbon*, inhabits the village square. The failure to appease each deity at its season spells doom for the King and his subjects. Therefore, Africans believe that divinities play specific roles in each community, though none demands human sacrifice nowadays.

When asked to list specific African spiritual realities the two films reflect, many participants indicate options like myths, deities, divination, demons, taboos, incantations, and charms. Yet, they worry about some distortions and negative projections. In particular, a participant in the Lagos FGD asks rhetorically, yes, they (i.e. MZFM films) portray African realities, but in what light? She worries that Nollywood and evangelical films often present African realities in a negative light. Another participant expresses her disgust at the barbaric and retrogressive projections of human sacrifice in the opening scene of *The Gods Are Dead*. She queries why evangelical films “portray human sacrifice as *an African thing* whereas other cultures once practised it.” In addition, she views the continuous filmic glamorization of obnoxious practices as synonymous with endorsing and encouraging them. She blames film producers for the resurgence of cultism, ritual killings, kidnapping for ransom and other abominable practices in Nigeria.<sup>21</sup> This opinion agrees with the study of Akan, Gbadeyan and Oluwaseun who adopt the Social Learning Theory and conclude that uncensored movies embolden youth violence and gangsterism in Nigeria.<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, other participants agree that both films conceive and project illicit content to denigrate the traditional religion and culture.

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<sup>21</sup> In pursuant to section 65 of the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) Act 2004, the government prohibited money ritual, ritual killing, and smoking in movies for glamorising such anti-social activities poses a negative influence on teens and young adults. See, THE PUNCH, “FG bans money ritual, smoking scenes in Nollywood films,” May 23, 2024, <https://punchng.com/fg-bans-money-ritual-smoking-scenes-in-nollywood-films/> (Assessed: May 23, 2024).

<sup>22</sup> Kevin A. Akan, Olawale J. Gbadeyan and Samuel O. Oluwaseun, “Implications of Media Exposure, Youth Violence and Gangsterism in Nigeria: The Agony of a Morally Dislocated Society,” *Revista Universitară de Sociologie* 1, no. 1 (2024): 239-246.



For instance, the films portray the gods of Bode Ajuwon and the bandits' juju as weak and impotent before the power of Jesus Christ. Hence, to the consternation of the Chiefs, the *Alajuwon* maligns the deities of the land as 'blood-sucking gods.' Specifically, a participant notes that such vilification is becoming a trademark of Nigerian Pentecostals as Rosalind Hackett<sup>23</sup> buttresses that African Pentecostals 'can be somewhat merciless toward 'traditional' and 'ancestral' cultural beliefs and practices in their campaigns. Presently, some Yoruba *Obas* disparage the traditional religion and culture while they profess Islam or Christianity. Hence, the call on *Obas* to embrace traditional values and culture.<sup>24</sup>

Also, African belief in taboos is reflected in the *Land of Fury*. In African cosmology, breaking a taboo is tantamount to breaching a covenant. The *price* that came with the *power General* and Mario had acquired was sleeplessness and an inability to defecate. Initially, both endured this discomfort but eventually got relieved through contact with their Christian abductees. Consequently, they lost the potency of the charms and succumbed to the police bullet.

Finally, on the reflections of African realities, both films contain a series of *coincidences*. For instance, while the Evangelist was leading the *Alajuwon* family in a vigil; Wingoroye (the Chief Priest) and others were at the *Alajogun* Forest invoking the gods. In *Land of Fury*, the bullet ultimately hit the *General* at the mention of the name *Jesus* by those praying in the town. Another concurrence in *The Gods Are Dead* is the arrival of malevolent spirits to wreak havoc on the palace at the instance of the Chief Priest who invoked them that night. However, a participant discards them as mere coincidences but rather a *spiritual connection* like the biblical case of Israel's victory at the raising of the hand of Moses (cf. Exod. 17:11). This concurs with the African dualistic creed in which events in the spiritual realm rule the physical. Therefore, the principle is 'Whoever gets the backup of the spiritual forces dictates the pace at the physical realm'. Hence, the

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<sup>23</sup> Rosalind I. J. Hackett, "Charismatic/Pentecostal Appropriation of Media Technologies in Nigeria and Ghana," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 3 (1998): 258-277.

<sup>24</sup> See, Shina Abubakar, "Abandoning Tradition, Reason Yoruba Obas Losing Relevance – Olowu-Kuta," <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/03/abandoning-tradition-reason-yoruba-obas-losing-relevance-olowu-kuta/> (Assessed: May 20, 2024).

penchant among Africans for spiritual power and control often comes at a price.

The FGD participants in Lagos, Enugu, and Abuja speak on the implications of the persistent distortions and negative portrayals of African spirituality by MZF movies and other evangelical film producers. Particularly, a Lagos academic group and participant points out three distortions in *The Gods Are Dead* that are taboos in Yoruba-African realities. First, an indigene is never sacrificed to the deity of his/her ancestral land. Hence, the saying, *A kii fi omo onile bo ile* (You do not sacrifice an indigene to the gods of their fatherland). Secondly, human sacrifices were never done in the presence of all and sundry in the open. Lastly, the *Oba* (King) should always wear a cap or crown, not mourn openly, view or touch a corpse. The three taboos were flagrantly defiled and then presented as African realities. This made another participant view the deliberate distortions as unprofessional, he cautions evangelicals not to throw professionalism overboard in their eagerness to win souls.

Furthermore, the participants identify iconoclasm, loss of cultural values, and religious crises as other effects of the negativity and distortions of African realities. The culture of denigrating others is endemic in all Abrahamic Faiths, except the Bahi'a Faith which is regarded as the amalgamation and fulfilment of all Faiths. Studies show that the introduction of Christianity and Islam to African villages and towns was replete with iconoclastic tendencies. For example, in his works on Egba-Yoruba land, Falako<sup>25</sup> observes that not everyone in Egba land acquiescently welcomed the Christian missionaries. Like Wingroye (the Chief Priest in *The Gods Are Dead*), Egba *Oloroguns* (Warriors), *Babalawos* (Traditional Diviners/Priests) and *Imams* (Muslim clerics) were persistently antagonistic. The *Oloroguns* were pro-slavery while the others remained jealous and feared losing their power and relevance in the land. Expectedly, the period witnessed incessant attacks and counterattacks in which each group resorted to hate speech, name-calling, obnoxious songs, and physical attacks to stifle others.

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<sup>25</sup> Francis O. Falako, "Perspectives of the Anglican Church on African Traditional Religion and Culture: A Study of Abeokuta, 1842-2000," *Nigerian Journal of African Law* (2020): 152-167.

Unfortunately, early European missionaries, anthropologists, and administrators reached fallacious conclusions on the African religion and culture. They labelled the people and their faith as primitive, fetish, savage, native, pagan, and idolatry.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, the early missionaries saw nothing worth preserving in African customs and Institutions outside the languages.... They regarded the converts as 'infants' reclaimed only recently from superstition and barbarism..... They looked upon themselves as 'Tutors and Governors' and behaved as little local popes.<sup>27</sup> Hastings attributes this stand on ignorance, pride, theological rigidity, and the intrinsic intertwining of religion and social life characteristic of traditional Africa.<sup>28</sup> While the Mainline churches have changed considerably from antagonism to appreciation-for-symbiotic-relationship, African Pentecostals/Charismatics still carry themselves as tutors, governors, and little local popes in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. By demonising and exorcising cultural traits in their followers who are encouraged to change ancestral names and reject family's praise names and *Oriki* (panegyrics), Isola accuses the Pentecostals/Charismatics of doing incalculable damages. Furthermore, he blames this on low originality and creativity and their blind imitation of American glamorous life.<sup>29</sup> Other African scholars attribute such hostilities to the inability or outright unwillingness to differentiate religion from culture.<sup>30</sup>

Lastly, the participants observe that distortions of African spirituality and deliberate obliterations of feasts and festivals are reasons for the cultural oblivion facing the Continent. In traditional Africa, socialization and education take the form of training, initiation rites and ceremonies by which people learn history, customs and traditions. Also, most didactic activities take place outdoors through the rites of passage, rituals and festivals.<sup>31</sup> Many studies have confirmed that these rites and ceremonies are full of educative symbolism and

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<sup>26</sup> Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 133.

<sup>27</sup> E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (London: Longman, 1966), 183.

<sup>28</sup> Adrian Hastings, *African Christianity; An Essay in Interpretation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1976), 38.

<sup>29</sup> Akinwunmi Isola, *Making Culture Memorable: Essays on Language, Culture and Development* (Ibadan: Hope, 2010), 15.

<sup>30</sup> See, Isola, *Making Culture Memorable* and Akin-Otiko, *Adimula Religion*.

<sup>31</sup> S. P. Ango, "African Traditions and Christian Teaching and Learning," in *Principles and Dynamics of Integrated Christian Teaching and Learning*, ed. S. P. Ango (Bangalore: ICHE, 2011), 155-192.

teaching/learning opportunities in community values and practical life skills.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Tolbert comments that ‘teachable moments’ occur in everyday and ordinary lives where values like hard work, respect for elders, courage, truthfulness, honesty, and chastity are internalized.<sup>33</sup>

To destroy icons, distort facts, and cancel festivals (as *Alajuwon* of Bode-Ajuwon did in *The Gods Are Dead*) would historically disconnect people from their roots and subsequently lead to the loss of identity. For example, a participant identifies such iconoclastic tendencies as one of the factors in the cultural disconnections and persistent ethnic-religious disturbances in Northern Nigeria.<sup>34</sup> While no particular divinity features in the *Land of Fury*, Abuja FGD participants note the near obliteration of cultural practices in the North; Andy Bature<sup>35</sup> observes that though Christianity and Islam reject idolatry, many Northerners still employ charms and amulets for self-fortification. Unfortunately, belief in amulets activates and makes banditry intractable. The use of talismans and hard drugs emboldened the bandits in *The Land of Fury* where Mario confesses that they joined cults and visited diviners in their unbridled desperation for power and wealth. He admits, “We became fearless, we could face anything and do anything. No weapon of man can harm the General. His partner-in-crime, (General) brags that I have eaten the heart of men, tasted the blood of men . . . . No weapon of man can pull me down . . . there are demons in me”.

These revelations bring to the fore some African socio-cultural realities like the belief in the efficacy of charms, especially those mixed with human organs and how the passion for power, wealth, and fame fuels the obstinacy of obnoxious practices in Nigeria.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ango, “African Traditions,” 157, and Francis O. Falako, “Pedagogical Significance of Title-Taking among Yoruba Christians of Southwestern Nigeria,” *Journal of Education* 10 (2017): 15-30.

<sup>33</sup> L. V. Tolbert, *Teaching like Jesus: A Practical Guide to Christian Education in Your Church* (Great Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 156.

<sup>34</sup> Ruth Audu, interview granted the researcher on February 15, 2022 in Abuja.

<sup>35</sup> Andy Bature, interview granted the researcher on February 15, 2022 in Abuja.

<sup>36</sup> Kidnappers and Insurgents indulge in such practices. See, Abimbola O. Adesoji, “Between Maitatsine and Boko Haram: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Response of the Nigerian State,” *Africa Today* 57, no. 4 (2011): 99-119, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/africatoday.57.4.99>

## Conclusion

Nigerian evangelicals have the penchant to distort, demonise and denounce African culture. Many find nothing excellent or worthy of preservation in African spirituality, values, and customs. Unfortunately, despite the acknowledged visible areas of convergences between African and Biblical worldviews, Evangelicals intentionally reinforce the negativities as confirmed by the two MZFM films. Towards changing the narrative, this study recommends an emphatic appreciation of the African culture by all evangelicals in general and film producers in particular.

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